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FEB. 86



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PHOTO COURTESY SKI WENTWORTH

Uphill struggles for the downhill ski industry

by Francis Moran

When you think of ski country, it's unlikely that Nova Scotia, Canada's renowned "Ocean Playground," inspires much of an image. The Rockies, Quebec's Laurentian Mountains, Ontario's Collingwood region and the ski resorts of New England have long had well-developed industries that exploited both their mountainous landscapes and nature's dubious gift of heavy snowfall. In Nova Scotia, downhillers were confined to a hardy bunch of dedicated enthusiasts who were willing to invest in equipment for a short season or travel well outside the province to find decent conditions.

The introduction of artificial snow-making facilities to Nova Scotia in the late '70s changed all that and downhill skiing, with an estimated 80,000 active participants across the province, is a booming, \$40 million a year recreational winter sport, according to ski area operators, retailers and other industry people. Ski Wentworth, 150 km north of metro, is the largest hill readily available to city dwellers. A private club managed by a board of directors elected by the 600 to 800 members who buy season's passes, Wentworth recorded 60,000 skier visits over a 98-day season last

year, says general manager Bob Edey. Ski Martock, outside Windsor, is only 50 km from metro but is a smaller hill. Still, with nighttime skiing, snow-making on 80 per cent of its trails and aggressive marketing, the hill is doing very well, says its owner and operator Joe O'Brien. With a \$500,000 upgrading completed over the summer, O'Brien says he's looking forward to another record year, helped along by more than 1,300 season pass holders.

But like any other industry struggling with near-vertical growth curves, the ski industry in Nova Scotia is trying to keep pace with its own success. Without substantial new development of ski hills — particularly in their ability to carry people to the top — and of hillside facilities, there are many in the industry who fear that boom will melt into bust faster than a spring thaw.

Wentworth's Edey is one of the concerned. "We think there are 60,000 skiers out there in our market. That's Halifax, Dartmouth, Moncton and all the little stops in between. There's absolutely no way we can accommodate that many. We can't accommodate 50 per cent of them. We just don't have the uphill capacity." At Martock, uphill capacity has been increased by adding more bars to the hill's t-bar lift but, O'Brien concedes, "that is only a stopgap measure." He says his peak periods "are as packed as they can be" and efforts now are concentrated on developing business during off-peak periods.

It was in the interests of drastically increasing Wentworth's uphill capacity that the club proposed a \$3.7 million expansion plan last year. As well as adding three new chairlifts and several new trails, the ambitious design called for an additional snow-making facility, extension of the base lodge and construction of a summit lodge. Water slides were also planned to make Wentworth a year-round resort that would employ about 20 people full-time and more than 100 during the winter season. In employment-starved Cumberland County, creating such a resort seemed like a good idea.

But the club was depending on funds allocated in the Canada-Nova Scotia Tourism Subsidiary Agreement, funds it has now become apparent it won't be able to tap. The tourism sub-agreement, signed in November 1984 as part of Nova Scotia's overall Economic and Regional Development Agreement (ERDA) with Ottawa, is aimed at attracting new tourism business to the province. "The focus is to increase

the internationally competitive position of Nova Scotia's tourism industry," says Ann Thompson, an official with the federal Department of Regional Industrial Expansion in Halifax. "We're dealing with the development of products that would be able to attract new business to Nova Scotia."

Edey says that focus counts Ski Wentworth out. "One of the major requirements would be that we could show a substantial increase in the number of tourists coming in to the province. And our response back was that there was no way that any skier was going to come from Quebec or New England, travel through New Brunswick to come to Nova Scotia to go skiing. But what we could do is we could retain a large percentage of those skiers...who leave the province every winter."

Edey and others estimate that between \$25 million and \$40 million leaves Nova Scotia annually in the pockets of skiers bound for better developed slopes; money that could be retained here if the province had competitive facilities of its own. That's known as "import substitution" but despite the fancy bureaucratic handle, the concept takes a back seat in current federal-provincial tourism development strategies. Says DRIE's Thompson, "Import substitution is a consideration but it is secondary to the development of products that will bring new business to Nova Scotia."

With Wentworth's ambitious expansion plans now very much on the back burner, Edey is critical both of the lack of government support for the industry and the encouragement given his club to go on a wild goose chase for dollars. "We had thought that we might be able to participate in the current sub-agreement. We had been led to believe that that was true in our discussion with both federal and provincial people who were involved in this redevelopment and nothing came of it. The way the thing was drafted, the way it came out of Ottawa, there was just nothing there for the ski industry," he says.

At least one ski enthusiast has had to scale down his own plans — Dr. Wylie Verge, a Dartmouth medical doctor, still hopes to see a condominium development built across from Wentworth hill. Instead of the 20-unit "chalet apartments" and pool, Verge is going ahead with just an owners' log clubhouse because he believes in the long-term success of Wentworth. Verge had hoped the investment package could prove a

Why?

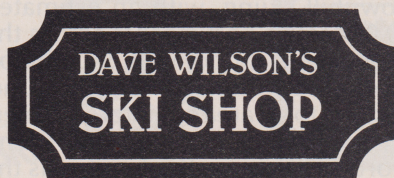
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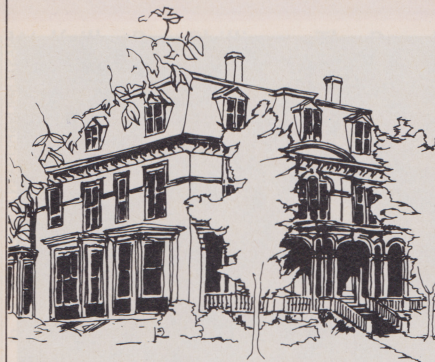
At the foot of the slopes
WENTWORTH VALLEY

catalyst in the ski club's efforts to win funding and says, "I felt that a private project that would inject \$1 million into the community would convince the government that there were people interested in investing in the area." His interest in the development is not only as a profit-making venture, although 12 of the 20 proposed units are "spoken for." Verge has owned a house and lived in Wentworth at least on weekends, for 12 years, and says, "I enjoy the community, it has a great community spirit."

Gordon Stewart, president of the Tourism Industry Association of Nova Scotia, says the ski industry shouldn't be too disappointed; that there's not much money in the sub-agreement for anyone. Out of the \$14 million in the federal-provincial cost-shared agreement, there's only \$1.43 million available for capital grants "which is really quite insignificant. In fact, it's quite worthless overall." But Stewart notes the amount of money being spent in Nova Scotia under its ERDA "is the lowest anywhere in the country." That's a point that's not lost on Edey and others, particularly where their own industry is concerned. "Other provinces have and are recognizing the ski industry for what it can do for the province in terms of its economy and job creation," Edey says.

The industry's phenomenal growth certainly has meant a lot of trade for equipment retailers. Mike MacInnis, manager of the ski shop at Cleve's Sporting Goods in Halifax has watched his store's ski business mushroom. "We've been in the ski business for five years and we started with a little corner in the store. It picked up and grew and grew and we moved three times and now we have almost a third of our store dedicated to skis from September until June. It's definitely a very big part of the store's business." But retailers like MacInnis are concerned that a lack of facilities will cause sales to flatten out. "People are starting to get tired of the 45-minute lineups," he says.

Turning people off the sport is a fear Edey, O'Brien and other operators feel keenly. "The parking lot's full up at 10 a.m. and what do we do when the parking lot's full up?" asks Edey in frustration. "They park down the road; they park in neighbors' yards," he adds. "And then some of them just get fed up. They see the parking lot's full up, they see the lineup is 45 minutes long, they turn around and go home and they don't come back. We're faced with that right now. Once we've turn-



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ed them off skiing, it's not likely that they'll come back to us."

O'Brien, who as a free enterpriser would prefer to see governments offering no more than lower-interest loans to the ski industry, argues nonetheless that if the industry gets public funds in other parts of the country, the same should hold true for Nova Scotia. "Everywhere else in Canada and in most places in the United States, it is government financing that is allowing these areas to put a facility in," Edey agrees. "We argue that the precedent has been set in the rest of the country. I don't care what province you go to, the provincial and the federal governments are prepared to invest money in the ski industry. It doesn't require huge influxes of money, we're not building a big industrial plant. And the jobs we create are every bit as valid as they are in any other industry."

"We have 80,000 skiers here," says Edey, "and we believe, a very good argument for investment in the industry. But nobody's listening." **c**

Downhill Ski Guide

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13 km from Antigonish, 40 km from
New Glasgow off Hwy. #104, Exit 30
9 runs, 1 T-bar, snow-making, night
skiing, equipment rental
Telephone: 863-1764

CAPE SMOKEY, Ingonish Ferry, Cape Breton

130 km from Sydney on the Cabot Trail
3 runs, 1 double chairlift, pony lift,
snow-making, equipment rental
Telephone: 285-2880 (Keltic Lodge)

BEN EOIN, Cape Breton

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More to Ski



Cross-country Family sport for all ages

It's called the best aerobic exercise there is. It's easy on the joints, doesn't leave you sore the next morning and it burns up more calories than sex. For all you downhill skiers who thought that cross-country skiing was just for "crunchy pine coners" — take note! Once considered the realm of the odd or unathletic few, cross-country skiing has become one of the fastest growing family sports in Nova Scotia.

Skiing has been around for a long time — an estimated 4,000 years. It was first introduced in the Maritimes about 1917 and one of the oldest ski clubs in Canada, The Halifax Ski Club, was started in Halifax in 1924.

"In those days skiing was not either cross-country or downhill, it was just skiing. The old leather 'bear trap' harnesses were so loose you could lift your heel and go anywhere — uphill, downhill, or through woods and fields," says Shirley Ellis, a member of the Halifax Ski Club during the '40s.

The Halifax Ski Club was incor-

porated through the efforts of some avid skiers. Their first ski trips were out to Sackville where they would ski through the woods to the Sackville River. The club then took trips further afield — going to Ellershouse, near Windsor, and to Wentworth where there was the largest hill within reasonable distance of Halifax. Roads were poor in those days, especially in the spring and winter. Through a contact with the CNR, the ski club arranged for an extra passenger car to be placed on the Ocean Limited. It travelled from Halifax to Montreal, passing through Wentworth.

This was the beginning of the famous ski trains. The problem with these trains, says Ellis, was their unpredictability. She remembers one night when a snow storm delayed the train returning to Halifax. They had to first hike up the mountain to the station, then wait all night for the train. However, the train station at Wentworth was too small for 20-odd members, so they had to take turns standing inside by the stove. To keep

warm, the members outside on the platform square-danced the night away while someone played the mouth organ. On this particular occasion Ellis remembers that when they finally got back to Halifax, she had time only to dress and get to work.

Cross-country skiing has grown in popularity in Nova Scotia in the last 15 years. During that time many other ski clubs have sprung up, as well as many resorts catering to the skiers.

One such club, The Halifax Women's Ski Club run by Wendy Scott, was formed in 1980. "We started with 12 people and a rickety old bus. Since then we have grown to 75 members," says Scott. "Our ski trips are mainly day trips, usually on Tuesdays to the Old Orchard Inn or Wentworth. We also have week-long ski trips to Keltic Lodge."

Accommodations can prove to be an equally enjoyable part of a cross-country ski trip. In Annapolis Royal there are two country inns operated by the owner of the Blomidon Inn in

Wolfville, Ron Phillips — The Bread and Roses, an old Victorian brick mansion, and the recently purchased Hillside House.

In the southern part of the province, Kejimikujik National Park covers a 381-square-kilometre area. The park has four cross-country ski areas with trails suitable for the beginner skier and a 25 km trek for the more experienced. In total, there are approximately 48 kilometres of trails.

Bruce and Nancy Gurnham, owners of The Whitman Inn located next to Kejie, describe the trails as breathtaking. "All are well marked," says Nancy, "and for the most part very easy to manage. There are a few parts that are tricky, like the run that has the tree at the bottom I can't help hitting every time."

Another spectacular skiing area is Keltic Lodge in Cape Breton. There are over 100 km of cross-country ski trails in the Cape Breton Highlands National Park, which range in difficulty from beginners' trails to more advanced with some very steep terrain.

Wendy Scott of the Halifax Women's Ski Club arranges two week-long trips a winter to Keltic. The cost is \$298 for a five-day trip. That includes return bus fare, lodgings and all meals.

Scott describes the trails in the Highlands Park as a skier's delight. They are well marked and most have been well-groomed. The only occasional problem has been when a moose has walked along the ski trails leaving its deep hoof prints, which tend to break up the snow.

A little closer to home, Scott organizes day trips to Wentworth. Unlike the days when Shirley Ellis and the Halifax Ski Club skied there, the resort is well-prepared for both downhill and cross-country.

As cross-country skiing has grown in popularity in Nova Scotia, so have the number of clubs. Besides The Halifax Women's Ski Club, a new club in Halifax has been formed called the Citadel Striders. So named because they can often be seen scurrying up and down Citadel Hill, this group of 25 to 30 individuals is active in racing and recruiting new members. Organizer Ron Rhodenizer says in particular they are looking for potential Canada Games athletes for 1987.

Rhodenizer is also national chairman for the Jackrabbit Ski League. This is a national cross-country ski program for eight to 13-year-old children. It's designed to acquaint youngsters with cross-country skiing and nutrition and fitness as well. The league provides a skill awards pro-

gram, much like most children experience with swimming lessons.

The Jackrabbit Ski League is named after Herman "Jackrabbit" Smith-Johannsen, who was born in Norway. After immigrating to Canada from the U.S., he pioneered the development of cross-country skiing in Eastern Canada.

As in starting any new sport, the cost of equipment can be expensive. However, the price of cross-country skis is going down because of technological improvements in the manufacturing. Prices range from \$69 to \$169. There are basically four types of cross-country skis: racing skis which are quite narrow; touring skis which are wider; back country skis which are wider still; and Telemark skis which have metal edges. The latter make it easier for the skier to grip on sharp turns and allows the more experienced skier to handle steep hills. Many ski shops offer a trade-in program for children's skis.



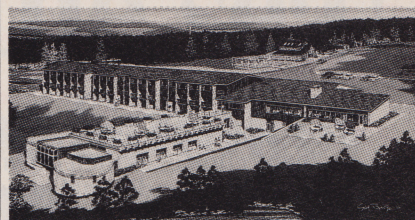
Boots range in price from \$34 to \$134; poles from \$6 to \$36 and bindings are about \$25.

Although cross-country skiing is increasing in popularity in the province, according to David Comeau of the Trail Shop, there is still a long way to go. He says, "Although cross-country skiing has picked up in Nova Scotia, it does nothing to rival B.C. Even when I was out there this summer, on Grouse Mountain the paths were busy with people roller skiing, keeping in shape for the winter months."

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- Deborah Draper

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Cross-country wear

Cross-country skiers have almost as many choices as their downhill cousins. Traditional knee-length woollen knickers are still around, as are jeans, but skiers have discovered the comfort and convenience of bright, light, wind resistant, two-piece warm-up suits, roomy enough for layering but slim fitting for maximum movement. Owners of local sporting goods store, Aerobics First, have designed their own unlined suits, from fabric that is 100 per cent nylon but has the look and feel of cotton. These come in a wide range of attractive colors — two-toned jackets with matching solid color pants.

Lycra tights, in burgundy, black and many shades of blue, are ideal under these suits, topped with a soft, warm woollen sweater — stylish, sporty and like everything else, versatile. Cumberland County Knitters, a Wallace, N.S. company makes hand-knit sweaters in warm, heathery colors, with contrasting fair isle yokes, that have matching mitts, socks,

scarves and toques. The outfit can be completed with leg warmers, which are best saved for après-ski wear. Many European sweaters are loose and lovely in pastel shades, and plackets, zippers, drawstrings and insets are the order of the day.

For the serious skier and racer, gleaming lycra-nylon one-piece suits hug the body like a second skin — skinny suits for skinny skis. Some European manufacturers are making the sleek, "skin suit" in slightly heavier, less shiny, fabric.

All the best ski wear isn't in the ski shops, some casual wear stores have padded canvas vests and jackets that are warm and comfortable, and need only a water resistant spray to adapt happily to the trails.

If you are not in the market for new clothing, check out accessories. A bright cotton turtleneck will jazz up a conservative ski suit. Metallic socks guarantee warm feet, as do socks in a silk-wool-nylon mix with shaped ankles for a snug fit. If it's really cold, the new neoprene ski masques cover



PHOTO 67

the lower face and cheeks.

However cold it is when you start out, half an hour of brisk skiing will warm up all but the most sedate skier, and each and every piece of cross-country wear can be bundled up in a fanny pack or knapsack and come out looking great — which is how you'll look from a day spent in the snow and sunshine.

- Anne Tempelman-Kluit

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Ski equipment A beginners' guide

Skiers speak a mysterious language full of words like moguls, schuss and slalom. But in order to christie and traverse in safety and style, the subject of boots, bindings and skis requires translation.

Downhill racer or pre-beginner, they all experience some confusion when it comes to equipment, and wandering through the maze of sporting goods stores and specialty magazines gives one the feeling of taking three steps backward rather than one forward. For the novice it's not a complete necessity to have ski boots color coordinated with flowered longjohns. It's more important to be outfitted with the equipment best suited to the skier's ability.

Three approaches to the problem are:

- rental;
- buying second-hand;
- investing in a modest "package".

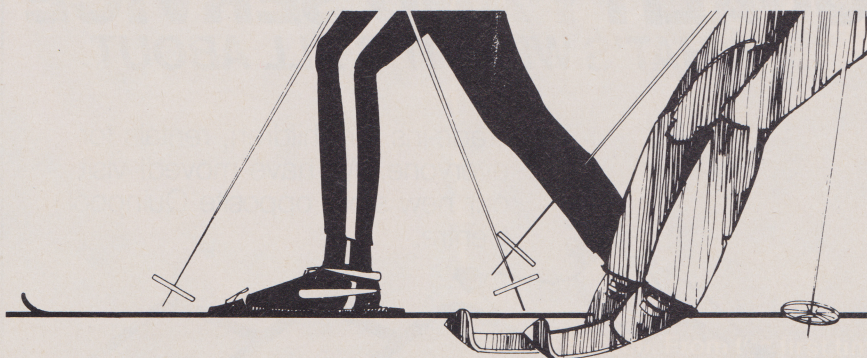
Through my experience as a ski instructor it's obvious that the majority of people who make it through their first lesson and day on the hill are hooked and return time and time again, joining the mad migration at 5 a.m. every winter weekend. But the first day's equipment can make or break a budding ski enthusiast. The boots may feel great in the lodge, the skis while poised on the roof-rack may perfectly match the car, but the two combined and attached to feet could easily create havoc on the slopes.

I advise renting all equipment for the first few outings. Keep a written record of the ski make, model and length — the same for boots and poles. Bindings are a different matter. They're rarely the same on rental equipment as those sold in stores.

Ski boots vary as much as shoes do from flip-flops. It's extremely important to have boots that fit well and keep the feet fairly warm (sometimes impossible in today's cold plastic boots). Top of the line boots are for top-notch skiers only. Beginners, even after jogging five kilometres a day in preparation for the ski season, can't hope to have legs strong enough to bend the hard shells.

Rental packages are found at every ski development and are now available at city ski shops. Line-ups are as inevitable as at the tows, but the wait is worth it for equipment that's safe and regularly tested.

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CFDR 68
WHERE VARIETY IS THE SPICE OF LIFE.

The Canadian Ski Patrol provides a service for those with rapidly growing kids and people not yet ready to invest in new equipment. The annual Ski Swap at Maritime Mall in Halifax is a clearing-house for hundreds of pieces of second-hand skis, boots and poles. Equipment is received during a week in late October and sold over the weekend, at the owners' suggested price with the ski patrol keeping a percentage. Ian Davie, ski patrol leader at Wentworth says the quality of skis has improved greatly in recent years. His advice is "first, buy the boot," then find the skis and bindings. The ski patrol stresses safety above all in choosing bindings. Davie says, "when gear comes in, if the binding isn't up to standard, we won't sell it to the public."

Once the decision is made to buy new equipment a skier may feel better after shopping around, but unless one store is advertising an incredible sale, prices are fairly consistent.

Sales people and ski mechanics are generally very knowledgeable about the performance of the goods they stock and won't try to sell world cup racing gear to a first-time skier. Bindings on skis are as important as tires on a car. It's not recommended that recreational skiers use bindings equipped with racing springs any more than to unearth grandmother's 1936 rat trap bindings.

Most ski areas have ski shops as well as rental and repair services. If you're going to buy equipment at the hill, it's advisable to avoid the morning rush and take a break from skiing later in the day. The ski shop may be able to provide a variety of demo skis, different from the inventory of the rental equipment.

For those who want to ski every minute the lift is open, there's now a number of Halifax specialty stores. Sports Experts on the Dutch Village Road, Aerobics First (you thought it was only for runners), and Cleve's have trained staff and high-quality, dependable equipment. They don't all carry the same lines, but the overlap in some areas gives both a wide selection and a competitive edge. Sports Experts are a little different. They have their own skis under the name Tecno, produced exclusively for them by an international ski manufacturer. The skis are good quality and reasonably priced.

No matter what the choice, rental, used or new, have your bindings checked by a qualified ski technician to make sure your ski season is safe and not sorry.

- Judy Robertson

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Nordica's racing technology has historically produced the boot of champions, and last season was no exception. Pirmin Zurbriggen skied away with the downhill and combined titles at the Bormio World Alpine Championships. On the pro side, Jarle Halsnes was victorious in every major title race winning the overall Peugeot Grand Prix, the U.S. Pro Championships and the World Pro Championships.

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Photo of
Pirmin Zurbriggen
World Champion

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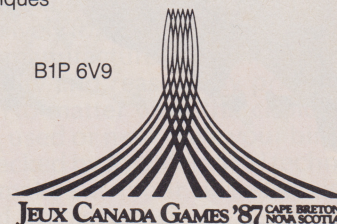




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Downhill Fashion: color and dash from the inside out

by Anne Tempelman-Kluit

Sleek, chic, bright and bold or pastel pretty, the choice is yours to look cool and stay warm on the slopes this winter. Local stores have a wide range of Canadian and European ski clothing, as well as some locally designed and manufactured, all of it versatile, comfortable — and flattering. Many ski outfits will take to the slopes and trails, and be equally at ease sailing, running, cycling, walking or just watching.

While colors and designs come and go, basic ski clothing, of necessity, doesn't change that much. But each year brings a bewildering array

of fabric finishes — antron, dacron, elasthan, gore-tex, montauk, parafin cloth, powdercloth, rattler, tadel, taslan, mariposa and polyamide to name a few, as well as different insulators of varying weights. Everyone wants to look good but how and where you ski has to be taken into consideration and the most important decision the skier has to make is how warmly to dress. Nothing is more miserable than shivering in the lift lines but overdressing causes excessive perspiration which, as it cools, also results in the shivers. Most assistants in local sporting goods



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stores are knowledgeable and informative skiers themselves. If you're not sure what you need, ask, if they're not sure, go somewhere else.

Several light layers of clothing, which produce insulated air pockets, are more effective, and comfortable, than a single bulky layer. Add or subtract as comfort dictates. But layering doesn't have to be lumpy.

Whatever goes on top, polypropylene underwear goes underneath. These crew or turtleneck tops and longjohns draw the moisture away from the skin, keeping you warm and

dry. This year manufacturers have added luscious peach and baby blue to the standard navy, bright blue, white or red sets.

Cotton turtleneck sweaters, usually the next layer, are available everywhere this year in a rainbow of colors and patterns. But what goes on next separates the racers from the recreational skiers.

Downhill skiers with the shape to wear them will welcome the return of the skin tight black stretch pant, without an extra ounce of fabric to slow you down. Fashion decrees that

these be tight enough for your companions to tell if it's heads or tails on the dime in your pocket.

For the expert, downhill racing pants in serious navy, red, grey or blue have slalom gate pads to protect hips, thighs, and knees. Matching, boldly striped sweaters are padded on arms and chest. Racers swear that these tight fitting outfits, worn over thermal underwear, are equal to any weather conditions. And just to prove that clothes do not make the skier, some racers have forsaken the traditional ski gloves for metallic insulated gloves or mitts, which reflect the heat back onto the body and are worn under gardening gloves. The newest coordinates are ski poles and gloves in acid yellow, pink, powder blue or white.

While gardening gloves, racing and stretch pants are only for the confident, anyone looks good in the softly-draped, easy fitting one-piece suits. These have always been popular with women, but now men are trying them out. For beginners these have the advantage of leaving no nooks or crannies to let in sifting snow and they're warm. Many one-piece suits are basically wind resistant shells and should be worn over a track suit, or sweater and tights, and insulated underwear. Local sporting goods stores have heavier one-piece suits, and with Nova Scotia's capricious weather conditions in mind, these have zippers that allow you to open various sections of the top for ventilation on warmer days.

Less is definitely more in downhill jackets and pants, unless you are talking about color. Thin thermal liners have mostly replaced the fluffier down, so jackets are lighter and slimmer fitting. Pockets are everywhere, and hoods, concealed in collars, have drawstrings and peaks. One manufacturer even provides an extra square of fabric, tucked in the bottom edge of a jacket, as a portable waterproof seat.

Caguals are neck warmers that have become elongated, and loose enough to cover the head and fall in cosy folds around the neck. Secure one end over the head with a matching or contrasting cap, or a twisted head band.

If you get to the slopes and discover you've left some vital item of clothing behind, don't despair. The ski shops on the hill have a complete range of clothing, much of it high fashion, one of a kind outfits.

This season, only your imagination can limit what you wear on the slopes — and how you wear it. **c**

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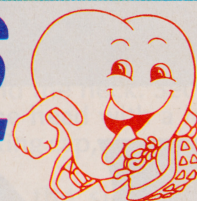
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